

Workplace happiness, hopelessness, and turnover intention: a gender-based multigroup analysis in an emerging market

Mario Alberto Salazar-Altamirano, Orlando Josué Martínez-Arvizu, Esthela Galván-Vela and Rafael Ravina-Ripoll

Abstract

Purpose – This study aims to examine the relationship between workplace happiness, hopelessness, and turnover intention, analysing how these emotional factors influence talent retention in Mexico's integration into global value chains. Understanding workplace wellbeing in competitive and demanding environments is critical for organisational sustainability.

Design/methodology/approach – Adopting a cross-sectional design, data were collected from 414 Mexican employees through online questionnaires and analysed using covariance-based structural equation modelling in Jamovi. The analysis tested the mediating role of hopelessness in the workplace happiness–turnover intention relationship and assessed whether gender moderates these effects.

Findings – Workplace happiness significantly reduces turnover intention; however, this protective effect is weakened when employees experience high levels of hopelessness. Gender-based differences were also observed: women benefit more from workplace happiness in reducing turnover intention, whereas men are more strongly affected by hopelessness.

Practical implications – The results emphasise the need for organisational strategies that foster emotional wellbeing and address gender-specific needs, particularly in companies where workforce stability is essential to maintaining operational performance.

Originality/value – This research advances the conservation of resources theory by demonstrating the mediating role of hopelessness in the link between workplace happiness and turnover intention, while incorporating a gender perspective seldom addressed in this context. It also provides empirical evidence on the role of emotional wellbeing in sustaining workforce stability in firms engaged in global trade.

Keywords Workplace happiness, Hopelessness, Turnover intention, Gender, Conservation of resources theory, Employee retention, Wellbeing, Job satisfaction, Organisational commitment

Paper type Research paper

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1. Introduction

Amid the so-called “Great Resignation,” which has caused an unprecedented global rise in employee turnover across sectors, organisations are placing growing importance on retaining strategic talent (Batiste, 2024). Recent global surveys indicate that voluntary turnover rates have reached historic highs, with emerging economies experiencing the fastest growth due to weaker labour protections and uneven recovery from the pandemic (OECD, 2021). Accelerated by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, this trend has brought emotional factors such as workplace happiness and hopelessness about career prospects to the forefront in explaining employees' intention to leave their jobs (Santhanam and Srinivas, 2019). Concurrently, the rapid integration of artificial intelligence (AI) and automation into organisational processes reshapes work, alters job roles, and introduces

new pressures and opportunities that influence employee wellbeing and turnover intention (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2019). These technological shifts are not evenly experienced across genders and industries, raising questions about differentiated impacts on emotional wellbeing and retention behaviours (ILO, 2019). Understanding these emotional dynamics in emerging economies like Mexico is essential, particularly given the limited academic research available in this context (Charles-Leija *et al.*, 2023).

High turnover in key sectors generates significant financial costs and weakens intellectual capital, internal cohesion, and organisational performance (Mercader *et al.*, 2021). Although academic interest in the connection between workplace happiness and turnover intention has grown, most studies have been conducted in developed countries (Galvan-Vela *et al.*, 2024). In Mexico, the labour market is shaped by precarious working conditions, restricted mobility, and notable gender disparities, which call for a more contextualised analysis (Montañez-Hernández *et al.*, 2020). Moreover, technological transformation, driven by AI adoption, is unevenly distributed across industries, potentially widening gender and socio-economic gaps in how employees experience these emotional states (Love *et al.*, 2024). It urgently needs context-specific evidence that integrates emotional and structural factors into talent retention models.

While economic infrastructure plays a role in organisational success, the emotional wellbeing of workers is equally important. Companies' ability to remain competitive increasingly depends on talent retention and employee satisfaction (Valdez-Juárez *et al.*, 2022). Despite this, gender-based emotional experiences at work have often been overlooked. As Pinazo-Dallenbach and Castelló-Sirvent (2023) explain, men and women experience workplace happiness and hopelessness differently, but few studies examine how these variations affect turnover intention (Berniell *et al.*, 2023). In countries like Mexico, where gender inequalities are more visible, it is crucial to adopt differentiated strategies (Sharma and Tiwari, 2022). These strategies must also consider the digitalisation of work and the psychological consequences of AI integration, which can either alleviate work overload through efficiency gains or heighten uncertainty and hopelessness when perceived as threatening job stability (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2019).

A further challenge is the overreliance on theoretical models developed in high-income countries. According to Flores (2022), these frameworks often fail to capture emerging economies' social, cultural, and economic conditions. Although the conservation of resources (COR) theory has been widely used to understand the connection between emotional wellbeing and workplace outcomes, it tends to neglect the role of hopelessness as a mediating factor (Chiva and Guinot, 2021). This study extends the COR framework to the current era of technological disruption, recognising that AI-related changes can function as both a source of emotional resources and a driver of resource depletion (Huet *et al.*, 2022). By incorporating hopelessness into the COR perspective within an emerging-market setting, this research addresses a conceptual blind spot. It offers a more nuanced understanding of resource loss in the digital age.

This study explores how workplace happiness and job-related hopelessness influence turnover intention among Mexican employees, incorporating a multigroup approach to identify gender-based differences. The research addresses a critical gap in empirical evidence from emerging markets by situating the analysis in the context of AI-driven workplace transformation. It contributes to theoretical debates on how technological change interacts with emotional wellbeing to shape retention outcomes. Romão *et al.* (2022) suggest that such findings can guide organisations in developing tailored retention strategies that align with their employees' emotional needs. The remainder of the article is organised as follows: Section 2 presents the literature review and the development of the research hypotheses; Section 3 describes the methodology, including data collection procedures, measures, and analytical techniques; Section 4 reports the empirical results and their interpretation; Section 5 discusses the findings about existing literature and outlines both theoretical and practical implications; and Section 6 concludes with the study's limitations and recommendations for future research.

2. Literature review

2.1 Workplace happiness

Workplace happiness (HAW), understood as a subjective sense of wellbeing within one's job, has become central in organisational psychology (Kun and Gadanez, 2019). It goes beyond simple job satisfaction, incorporating emotional and motivational elements that directly influence employee performance and retention (Salazar-Altamirano *et al.*, 2024). It is also associated with greater resilience in challenging situations, lowering turnover intention and fostering organisational commitment (Martínez-Falcó *et al.*, 2024).

Given current labour market volatility, workplace happiness is increasingly viewed as a pillar of organisational stability and productivity (Ravina-Ripoll *et al.*, 2024). Companies are now recognising the need to support emotional wellbeing to enhance performance and employee loyalty (Nayal *et al.*, 2021). It has led to "Happiness management," where firms actively develop work environments that improve quality of life and reduce staff turnover (Ravina-Ripoll *et al.*, 2022). Sharma and Tiwari (2022) show that such approaches are linked to stronger organisational outcomes.

Despite this, few studies examine the relationship between workplace happiness and hopelessness. Liu *et al.* (2019), studying over 5,000 rural health workers in China, found that workplace happiness reduced the effects of hopelessness and lowered turnover intention. It suggests that happiness can act as a buffer against emotional distress, although in especially adverse contexts it may not be fully effective. These findings highlight the need to consider how positive emotions interact with negative ones when evaluating staff retention.

Most existing research has focused on job satisfaction rather than the broader concept of happiness. For example, Lok *et al.* (2023) found that increased job satisfaction reduced hopelessness among healthcare workers. Similarly, Jurek *et al.* (2023), studying Polish workers, observed that while hopelessness increased dissatisfaction, this effect was mitigated among religious women through spirituality. By analysing the interaction between workplace happiness and hopelessness, the current study aims to understand better how emotional factors shape turnover intention and inform retention strategies. Accordingly, the following hypotheses are proposed:

- H1. Greater workplace happiness will lead to lower hopelessness among employees.
- H2. Greater workplace happiness will result in lower turnover intention among employees.

2.2 Workplace hopelessness

Workplace hopelessness (WOHOS) refers to emotional distress marked by helplessness, frustration, and a lack of positive expectations about one's professional future (Potosky and Azan, 2022; TenHouten, 2022). It arises from persistent stress, limited career progression, and job insecurity (Pratap *et al.*, 2021).

Empirical studies in clinical and organisational contexts underline that emotional exhaustion and reduced hope mechanisms, though distinct, operate via similar resource-depleting pathways. For example, excessive workload and workplace violence were found to elevate emotional burnout and turnover intention among trainee physicians (Yun *et al.*, 2023). This condition negatively impacts employees' motivation, productivity, and overall wellbeing, substantially raising turnover risk (Aguglia *et al.*, 2021). The concept aligns with the COR theory, which suggests that the ongoing depletion of emotional resources, like stability and organisational support, leads to hopelessness and emotional exhaustion (Meng and Choi, 2021).

The relevance of workplace hopelessness has grown significantly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has heightened employment uncertainty across multiple sectors (Ke *et al.*, 2022). As Lu and Zhuang (2023) note, this emotional state damages psychological wellbeing and undermines performance and workplace happiness. The combined effects

strain employee–employer relationships and challenge organisational cohesion, making addressing hopelessness as part of broader talent management and wellbeing strategies essential. Based on the foregoing discussion, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H3. Higher levels of hopelessness will lead to higher turnover intention among employees.

2.3 Turnover intention

Turnover intention (TI), understood as an employee's tendency to consider leaving their job, has become a central topic in organisational psychology and talent management (Galván-Vela *et al.*, 2022; Rajput and Sharma, 2024). It is considered a reliable predictor of actual turnover, making it crucial for anticipating organisational risks such as productivity loss and increased costs (Gebregziabher *et al.*, 2020). This intention is shaped by multiple factors, including psychological wellbeing, job satisfaction, and workplace conditions (DiPietro *et al.*, 2019), and its relevance has grown in the wake of the “Great Resignation” (Patrick *et al.*, 2023a, 2023b).

In emerging economies like Mexico, high turnover rates are aggravated by job insecurity and poor working conditions (Charles-Leija *et al.*, 2023). Emotional factors such as workplace happiness and hopelessness are now viewed as key contributors to employees' desire to leave (Morales-García *et al.*, 2024). However, recent findings on their influence remain mixed. For example, Charles-Leija *et al.* (2023) found that a sense of purpose at work reduced turnover intention in Mexico, while Weeraratna *et al.* (2022) noted that in Sri Lanka's textile sector, adverse conditions overpowered the benefits of happiness, leading to higher turnover rates.

Hopelessness has also shown varied effects. Santhanam and Srinivas (2019) reported that Indian manufacturing workers experiencing high levels of hopelessness and burnout were more likely to resign. By contrast, Al-Ali *et al.* (2019) found no significant link in the UAE oil and gas sector, where professional development played a more influential role. These findings suggest that the impact of hopelessness may vary depending on sector and context, calling for more nuanced investigations.

Only a few studies have examined workplace happiness and hopelessness together. Sharma and Tiwari (2022) found that in India's tech sector, happiness buffered the adverse effects of hopelessness, lowering turnover intention. However, Rasheed *et al.* (2020) in China's hospitality industry found no such relationships, suggesting that in some environments, factors like career advancement outweigh emotional wellbeing. It reinforces the idea that emotional predictors do not operate uniformly across all settings.

Gender also plays a critical role in shaping these dynamics. Nehemnya and Bangun (2023) found that men in Indonesia's public sector were more affected by hopelessness, while women were more sensitive to reduced workplace happiness. Similarly, Muhammad *et al.* (2022) reported that happiness substantially influenced reducing turnover intention in women, especially under high-stress conditions like the COVID-19 pandemic. These results highlight the need for gender-sensitive strategies when addressing emotional wellbeing and retention.

2.4 Mediation and conservation of resources theory

The role of workplace hopelessness as a mediator between workplace happiness and turnover intention is grounded in the strong influence negative emotions have on work behaviour (Akgunduz *et al.*, 2022; Bellamkonda and Pattusamy, 2022). In high-pressure environments, prolonged stress can diminish the protective value of workplace happiness, allowing hopelessness to emerge as a pivotal factor (Zhang *et al.*, 2024). In such cases, hopelessness modifies the direct impact of happiness by amplifying negative emotional responses, thus increasing employees' tendency to consider leaving the organisation.

Theoretically, this study extends the COR theory by examining how emotional resources are preserved or lost. As proposed by [Hobfoll \(1989\)](#), individuals strive to acquire and safeguard resources like emotional stability and wellbeing. Happiness at work functions as a valuable resource, helping prevent emotional exhaustion. However, the emergence of hopelessness signals resource loss, undermining emotional resilience and heightening turnover intention ([Chiva and Guinot, 2021](#)). In this way, hopelessness mediates the relationship by eroding individuals' capacity to retain emotional strength under stress.

This research also introduces a multigroup gender analysis to explore whether the mediating role of hopelessness differs between men and women. Prior studies suggest that emotional wellbeing and stress are experienced differently across genders, potentially leading to unequal impacts from resource depletion ([Nehemnya and Bangun, 2023](#)). This approach aims to provide a more detailed understanding of how hopelessness influences the link between workplace happiness and turnover, offering insights for gender-sensitive retention strategies. Considering the theoretical framework and empirical evidence discussed, the following hypotheses are advanced:

H4. Hopelessness will mediate the relationship between workplace happiness and turnover intention, partially explaining how happiness reduces turnover intention.

H5. The relationships between workplace happiness, hopelessness, and turnover intention differ significantly between men and women, showing gender-specific patterns.

As noted in the introduction, current literature on workplace happiness, hopelessness, and turnover intention presents important gaps. Studies in emerging economies remain limited, with most theoretical frameworks being developed in high-income contexts that do not fully reflect the socio-economic and cultural realities of countries such as Mexico ([Flores, 2022](#); [Weerarathna et al., 2022](#)). In addition, the mediating role of workplace hopelessness in the relationship between happiness and turnover intention is underexplored, despite its potential to refine the COR theory ([Chiva and Guinot, 2021](#)). Furthermore, gender-based differences in these relationships are often overlooked, even though evidence suggests that men and women experience and respond to workplace happiness and hopelessness differently ([Pinazo-Dallenbach and Castelló-Sirvent, 2023](#); [Berniell et al., 2023](#)). Finally, as highlighted in recent studies, integrating AI and automation into organisational processes reshapes work environments and may interact with these emotional factors in influencing retention outcomes ([Kaplan and Haenlein, 2019](#); [Love et al., 2024](#)).

Considering these gaps, this study addresses the following research questions, in alignment with its overall objective:

RQ1. How does workplace happiness influence hopelessness and turnover intention in an emerging economy?

RQ2. Does workplace hopelessness mediate the relationship between workplace happiness and turnover intention?

RQ3. Are there significant gender-based differences in these relationships, and how might they be affected by AI-driven workplace transformations?

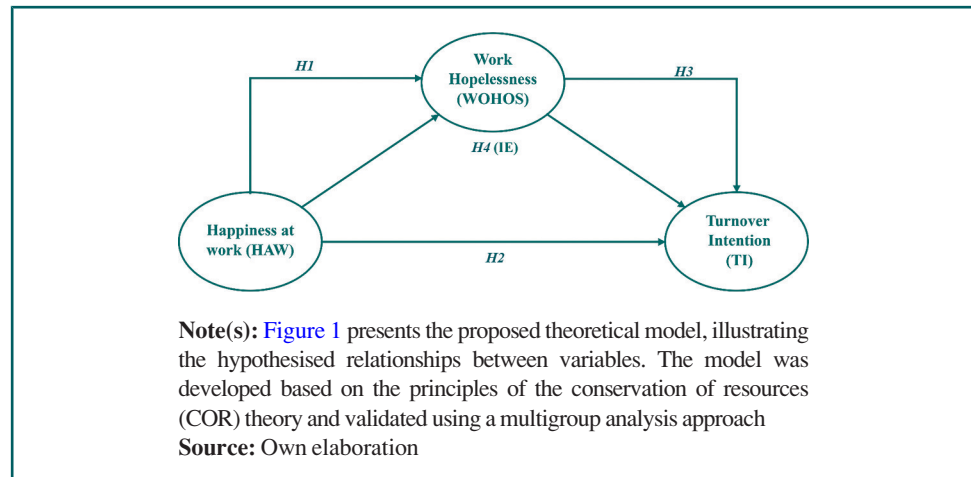
The theoretical model associated with these hypotheses is shown in [Figure 1](#).

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants and procedure

This study employed a quantitative, non-experimental, cross-sectional design. Data were collected via convenience sampling between August and September 2024, using self-report questionnaires distributed through an accessible online platform. Although convenience sampling was selected for its practicality and accessibility, efforts were made

Figure 1 Proposed theoretical model



to mitigate potential biases by including participants from diverse sectors, organisational sizes, genders, and professional roles, thus improving representativeness and reducing homogeneity risks. Participants were drawn from various organisations in Tijuana, a city strategically positioned due to its economic relevance. This method facilitated efficient data collection across various work settings and organisational types.

In line with best practices for primary-data studies (Abhishek *et al.*, 2025), the questionnaire was assembled from previously validated scales identified through a systematic literature review and adapted to the Mexican context via a translation–back-translation procedure. Content adequacy was assessed through expert judgement (three academics and two HR practitioners), and a pilot test with 38 participants evaluated clarity, contextual relevance, and completion time, prompting minor wording adjustments. This process helped ensure content validity and contextual fit prior to complete data collection.

The final sample comprised 414 participants, with 63.04% identifying as women and 36.96% as men. Regarding professional roles, 47.10% were in middle management, 38.41% in junior positions, 7.25% held senior management roles, and 7.25% were business owners. This composition allowed for comparisons across different levels of organisational hierarchy, reflecting varied workplace experiences.

Organisational size also varied: 53.86% of participants worked in large companies, with the rest employed in micro (14.98%), small (12.80%), or medium-sized (18.36%) firms. The sample was nearly evenly split between public (51.69%) and private (48.31%) institutions. Participants' ages ranged from 18 to 70 years, with a mean of 36.9 and a standard deviation of 9.92, offering a broad perspective from professionals at different career stages.

Participation was voluntary and anonymous; informed consent was obtained electronically. Data were screened for completeness and duplicates before analysis, and only responses from currently employed participants (filter question) were retained.

Given the study's emphasis on theory testing and the need to evaluate the model's global fit, covariance-based structural equation modelling (CB-SEM) was selected over partial least squares SEM (PLS-SEM). This choice aligns with the study's objective to confirm hypothesised relationships within an established theoretical framework rather than focusing on prediction alone.

3.2 Instruments

Data were collected using several validated instruments tailored to the variables of interest. All measures were multi-item Likert-type scales with demonstrated psychometric properties

in prior studies and were reassessed for construct validity through confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) before hypothesis testing. Workplace happiness was measured with the short version of the Happiness at Work Scale, adapted and validated by [Feitor et al. \(2022\)](#), which assesses wellbeing and satisfaction in the work setting. Turnover intention was evaluated using the scale [Bothma and Roodt \(2013\)](#) developed to capture employees' predisposition to leave their current job. Workplace hopelessness was assessed using the short version of the Hopelessness Scale, adapted by [Koryczan et al. \(2020\)](#), which reflects levels of emotional exhaustion and pessimism in the workplace. All items were rated on a five-point Likert scale. Additionally, demographic variables such as gender, age, job position, and organisational type were included to support a more detailed sample characterisation and enable richer, context-specific analysis. The complete wording of all items and their response formats is provided in [Appendix](#) to ensure transparency and replicability.

3.3 Data analysis technique

The data were analysed using Jamovi (version 2.3.28), a user-friendly software capable of executing complex statistical procedures ([Şahin and Aybek, 2019](#)). The analysis began with a univariate examination of workplace happiness, turnover intention, and workplace hopelessness, assessing central tendency, skewness, and kurtosis to ensure data validity. A CFA was then conducted to evaluate the convergent and discriminant validity of the measurement scales, as previous validation in academic literature made exploratory factor analysis (EFA) unnecessary ([Hair et al., 2019](#); [Kline, 2015](#)).

Discriminant validity was further assessed using the Fornell–Larcker criterion and the heterotrait–monotrait (HTMT) ratio of correlations, following the recommendations of [Abhishek et al. \(2025\)](#) for primary-data studies. HTMT values below the conservative 0.85 threshold were considered evidence of adequate construct distinctiveness before proceeding to hypothesis testing.

To assess potential multicollinearity, variance inflation factor (VIF) diagnostics were computed for the observed variables included as predictors in the CB-SEM model; all VIF values were below the conservative threshold of 3.3, indicating no collinearity concerns. Harman's single-factor test was applied to detect common method bias, confirming that a single factor did not account for most of the variance. Therefore, bias was not a significant concern ([Podsakoff et al., 2003](#)).

A multigroup analysis (MGA) was conducted within the CB-SEM framework to explore gender-based differences in variable relationships, as demographic factors may affect these interactions ([Cheah et al., 2020](#)). Before multigroup comparisons, measurement invariance (configural, metric, and scalar) was assessed using Δ CFI criteria, supporting meaningful gender-based MGA. Procedural remedies were implemented to mitigate standard method variance, including anonymity assurances and counterbalancing of measures. To strengthen internal validity, a filter question ensured that only active workers participated, and gender was recorded as a control variable, helping to reduce context-related bias in the results.

4. Results and discussion

4.1 Confirmatory factor analysis

A CFA was carried out to assess the internal structure of the workplace happiness, job-related hopelessness, and turnover intention scales. Item correlations were all significant at $p < 0.001$, with moderate to high ranges: 0.509–0.732 for workplace happiness, 0.570–0.714 for hopelessness, and 0.657–0.794 for turnover intention. These figures indicate strong internal consistency across all three scales. The correlation matrix

determinants (0.072 for happiness, 0.239 for hopelessness, and 0.006 for turnover) also confirmed no multicollinearity issues.

Communality values supported item adequacy, ranging from 0.581 to 0.760 for workplace happiness, 0.740 to 0.848 for hopelessness, and 0.713 to 0.831 for turnover intention. The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin test results exceeded the minimum threshold of 0.6, with values of 0.848, 0.705, and 0.918, respectively, confirming sample adequacy. Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant in all cases ($p < 0.001$), validating the suitability of the data for factor analysis. Additionally, total variance explained was 67.88% for workplace happiness, 77.71% for job-related hopelessness, and 77.00% for turnover intention, indicating strong explanatory power of the scales (De Barros Ahrens *et al.*, 2020).

4.2 Structural equation modelling

To assess the proposed model and the relationships between workplace happiness, workplace hopelessness, and turnover intention, CB-SEM was employed using Jamovi. This analysis enabled the evaluation of model fit and construct validity, offering a detailed understanding of the direct and indirect interactions between variables. A MGA was also conducted to explore gender-based variations, enhancing the interpretation of contextual differences and revealing patterns in how these emotional and behavioural constructs operate across different labour subgroups.

4.2.1 Convergent and discriminant validity. Convergent and discriminant validity were assessed to ensure the distinctiveness and accuracy of the workplace happiness, hopelessness, and turnover intention constructs. Cronbach's alpha values demonstrated strong internal consistency: 0.871 for workplace happiness (0.867 for women; 0.878 for men), 0.857 for hopelessness (0.849 for women; 0.873 for men), and 0.940 for turnover intention (0.943 for women; 0.935 for men), all surpassing reliability standards (Hair *et al.*, 2019).

Composite reliability and average variance extracted (AVE) further supported convergent validity, with scores of 0.875 (happiness), 0.865 (hopelessness), and 0.937 (turnover intention) for the full sample (Hair and Alamer, 2022). AVE values were all above the 0.50 benchmark, confirming that each construct explained a sufficient proportion of variance: 0.640 for happiness, 0.678 for hopelessness, and 0.727 for turnover intention, with consistent subgroup values for men and women (Hair *et al.*, 2019) (see Table 1).

Discriminant validity was confirmed using the HTMT ratio and the Fornell–Larcker criterion. HTMT values were below the 0.85 threshold: 0.555 between happiness and hopelessness, 0.610 between happiness and turnover intention, and 0.718 between hopelessness and turnover intention, indicating acceptable separation between constructs (Henseler *et al.*, 2015). The Fornell–Larcker test also supported discriminant validity, with square roots of the AVEs (0.800 for happiness, 0.823 for hopelessness, and 0.853 for turnover intention) exceeding inter-construct correlations (Hair and Alamer, 2022).

4.2.2 Fit indices. The model's fit was assessed using several goodness-of-fit indicators for the complete sample and the MGA. The CMIN values were 209 for the overall sample and 301 for the MGA, aligning with the recommendation that CMIN should approximate twice the degrees of freedom (Hair *et al.*, 2019). Although both models returned marginal significance levels ($p = 0.001$), this result is typical in large-sample structural equation models and does not necessarily indicate poor model fit (Hair and Alamer, 2022).

Absolute fit indices confirmed the model's adequacy. The standardised root mean square residual (SRMR) values were 0.044 for the full sample and 0.049 for the MGA, well below the accepted threshold of 0.08 (Hair *et al.*, 2019). Similarly, the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) values were 0.076 and 0.083, respectively, which are within the

“good fit” range (≤ 0.08), indicating that the model’s approximation error is acceptable for both overall and group-specific analyses (Hair and Alamer, 2022).

Regarding incremental fit, the comparative fit index (CFI), incremental fit index (IFI), and Tucker–Lewis index (TLI) all exceeded the recommended cut-off of 0.900. The values for the full sample were 0.963 (CFI), 0.964 (IFI), and 0.954 (TLI). At the same time, the MGA yielded 0.957, 0.957, and 0.945, respectively, all of which surpass the conventional ≥ 0.95 threshold for “good fit,” demonstrating that the hypothesised model provides an excellent representation of the observed data (Hair et al., 2019).

Parsimonious fit indices also supported model adequacy. The CMIN/DF ratio was 3.37 for the complete sample and 2.42 for the MGA – both acceptable for moderately complex models. The parsimony goodness-of-fit index (PGFI) values of 0.590 and 0.588 exceeded the 0.500 threshold (Hair et al., 2019). These combined results confirm the model’s solid fit and are summarised in Table 2. These indicators confirm that the model meets or exceeds recognised benchmarks for good fit, supporting its theoretical and empirical robustness.

4.3 Multigroup analysis

A MGA was performed to determine whether the relationships in the proposed model were consistent across gender groups. An invariance analysis was first conducted to ensure meaningful comparisons, confirming measurement equivalence across groups. This step allowed for valid comparisons of the structural relationships. It supported hypothesis testing aimed at identifying significant differences in how the model’s core variables interact across gender, thus highlighting the role of contextual influences.

4.3.1 Invariance analysis. The invariance analysis was conducted at three levels: configural, metric, and scalar. The configural model demonstrated good fit (CFI=0.957, RMSEA=0.083, SRMR=0.049), confirming the factorial structure was consistent across groups. The metric model also showed acceptable fit (CFI=0.956, RMSEA=0.080, SRMR=0.054), with a minimal change in CFI (Δ CFI=0.001), indicating equivalent factor loadings. Similarly, the scalar model retained a good fit (CFI=0.953, RMSEA=0.080, SRMR=0.056), with a slight CFI variation (Δ CFI=0.003), supporting the equality of intercepts. These findings meet the criteria Yuan and Chan (2016) outlined, validating the structural comparisons between men and women.

Table 1 Convergent and discriminant validity

Construct	Cronbach's alpha			Composite reliability			AVE		
	Full sample	Female	Male	Full sample	Female	Male	Full sample	Female	Male
<i>Convergent validity</i>									
1 Happiness at work	0.871	0.867	0.878	0.875	0.872	0.865	0.640	0.638	0.649
2 Work hopelessness	0.857	0.849	0.873	0.865	0.866	0.878	0.678	0.669	0.699
3 Turnover intention	0.940	0.943	0.935	0.937	0.938	0.935	0.727	0.737	0.711
HTMT criterion Fornell–Larcker criterion									
		1	2	3		1		2	3
<i>Discriminant validity</i>									
1 Happiness at work						0.800			
2 Work hopelessness		0.555				–0.557		0.823	
3 Turnover intention		0.610	0.718			–0.591		0.692	0.853
Note(s): Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability ≥ 0.7 indicate good internal consistency; AVE ≥ 0.5 confirms convergent validity; HTMT ≤ 0.85 or ≤ 0.90 confirms discriminant validity; Fornell–Larcker criterion requires the square root of AVE to exceed inter-construct correlations; analysis follows Hair et al. (2019) and Henseler et al. (2015)									
Source(s): Own elaboration									

Table 2 Measures of fit

Type of fit	Fit measure	Acceptance level	Full sample	MGA	Acceptability
Absolute or global	CMIN	CMIN = double of DF	209	301	Acceptable
	<i>p</i> -value	>0.05	0.001	0.001	Marginal
	SRMR	<0.08	0.044	0.049	Acceptable
	RMSEA	<0.08	0.076	0.083	Acceptable
Incremental	CFI	>0.900	0.963	0.957	Acceptable
	IFI	>0.900	0.964	0.957	Acceptable
	TLI	>0.900	0.954	0.945	Acceptable
Parsimonious	CMIN/DF	>2	3.37	2.42	Acceptable
	PGFI	>0.500	0.590	0.588	Acceptable

Note(s): Fit measures follow established thresholds: CMIN $\approx 2 \times \text{DF}$ (acceptable if marginally higher); *p*-value > 0.05 for model acceptance; SRMR < 0.08 and RMSEA < 0.08 indicate good fit; CFI, IFI, TLI > 0.900 are acceptable; PGFI > 0.500 confirms model parsimony; analysis adheres to guidelines by [Hair et al. \(2019\)](#)

Source(s): Own elaboration

4.3.2 Hypothesis testing. The hypothesis testing results, shown in [Table 3](#), revealed key group differences. For *H1*, HAW negatively predicted WOHOS across all groups: total sample ($\beta = -0.557$; $p < 0.001$), women ($\beta = -0.593$; $p < 0.001$), and men ($\beta = -0.519$; $p < 0.001$), with a modest group difference ($\Delta = -0.074$). It confirms that increased happiness is associated with lower hopelessness across genders.

In *H2*, workplace happiness negatively predicted TI in the total sample ($\beta = -0.299$; $p < 0.001$) and among women ($\beta = -0.397$; $p < 0.001$), but the effect was non-significant in men ($\beta = -0.128$; $p = 0.106$), indicating a notable gender difference ($\Delta = -0.269$). It suggests workplace happiness influences women's intention to stay more strongly than men's.

For *H3*, workplace hopelessness positively affected turnover intention in all groups: total sample ($\beta = 0.526$; $p < 0.001$), women ($\beta = 0.432$; $p < 0.001$), and men ($\beta = 0.671$; $p < 0.001$), with a more substantial effect observed in men ($\Delta = -0.239$), suggesting that hopelessness is a more potent driver of turnover intention among male employees.

Finally, *H4* confirmed the mediating role of workplace hopelessness between happiness and turnover intention. This indirect effect was significant in the total sample ($\beta = -0.287$; $p < 0.001$), women ($\beta = -0.256$; $p < 0.001$), and men ($\beta = -0.349$; $p < 0.001$), with a group difference of $\Delta = 0.093$. These findings show that workplace hopelessness significantly mediates the relationship in both genders, though with a slightly greater impact among men.

The multigroup analysis reveals a key contribution of this study: workplace happiness and hopelessness operate differently across genders, with happiness playing a stronger role in reducing turnover among women, while hopelessness exerts a more pronounced effect on

Table 3 Hypothesis testing

Hypothesis	Variable				Full sample	Female	Male	MGA difference
Direct effects								
H1	WOHOS	←	HAW		−0.557*	−0.593*	−0.519*	−0.074*
H2	TI	←	HAW		−0.299*	−0.397*	−0.128	−0.269*
H3	TI	←	WOHOS		0.526*	0.432*	0.671*	−0.239*
Indirect effects								
H4	TI	←	WOHOS	← HAW	−0.287*	−0.256*	−0.349*	0.093*

Note(s): * $p < 0.001$

Source(s): Own elaboration

men's turnover intention, insights that can guide targeted, gender-sensitive retention strategies.

Figure 2 illustrates the structural model for the full sample, highlighting the relationships among HAW, WOHOS, and TI. The diagram displays direct and indirect paths, showing how happiness impacts hopelessness and influences turnover intention. The model's explanatory power is reflected in the R^2 values: 0.310 for workplace hopelessness and 0.540 for turnover intention. According to Hair *et al.* (2013), these values indicate an adequate model fit. The R^2 of 0.540 suggests that workplace happiness and hopelessness moderately influence turnover intention, while the R^2 of 0.310 shows that happiness is a relevant, though moderate, predictor of hopelessness.

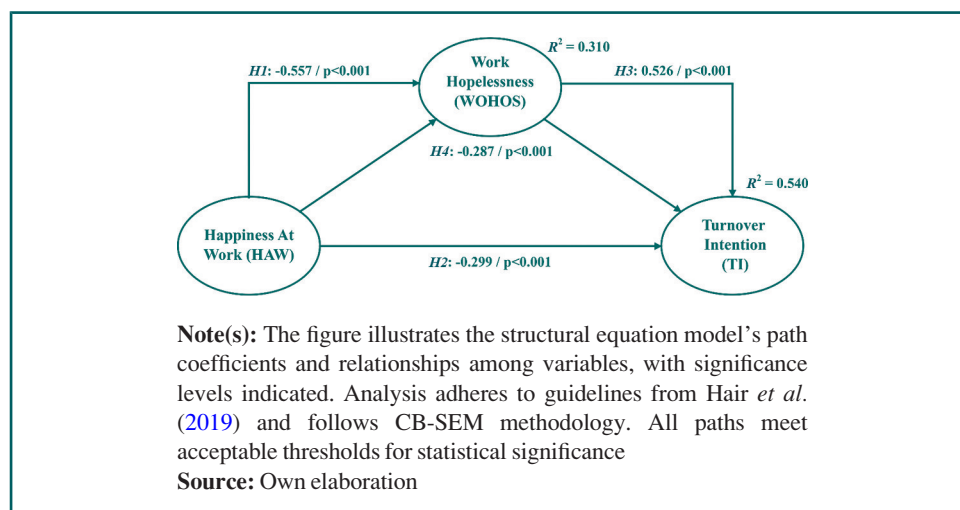
5. Discussion

This study provides insight into how workplace happiness, hopelessness, and turnover intention interact within the Mexican context, revealing significant gender differences. Regarding *H1*, the negative relationship between HAW and WOHOS was stronger in women ($\beta = -0.593$) than in men ($\beta = -0.519$), with a group difference of $\Delta = -0.074$. It supports findings by Muhammad *et al.* (2022), who observed that women place a higher value on emotional wellbeing and social support at work. In contrast, men may prioritise economic or developmental factors, aligning with Santhanam and Srinivas (2019), who note that extrinsic motivators hold greater weight for men under workplace stress.

H2 further confirmed gender differences in how workplace happiness influences TI. The relationship was significant in women ($\beta = -0.397$) and the full sample ($\beta = -0.299$), but not in men ($\beta = -0.128$; $p = 0.106$), with a group difference of $\Delta = -0.269$. These findings align with Nehemnya and Bangun (2023) and Pinazo-Dallenbach and Castelló-Sirvent (2023), who report that women's emotional connection to work reduces their intention to leave. Meanwhile, men's weaker emotional attachment may reflect a focus on financial security or professional growth (Galván-Vela *et al.*, 2022), explaining the lack of significance in their group.

For *H3*, workplace hopelessness had a positive and significant effect on turnover intention in both genders, but was stronger among men ($\beta = 0.671$) than women ($\beta = 0.432$), with $\Delta = -0.239$. It supports the COR theory, which suggests that emotional resource loss intensifies turnover risk (Chiva and Guinot, 2021). The stronger male response to hopelessness aligns

Figure 2 Structural model (total sample)



with [Santhanam and Srinivas \(2019\)](#), who argue that men perceive hopelessness as a greater threat to their stability. Women, by contrast, may benefit from stronger interpersonal support networks at work, which help buffer emotional stress and reduce turnover intention.

H4 confirmed that workplace hopelessness mediates the relationship between happiness and turnover intention in both groups. This indirect effect was significant in the total sample ($\beta = -0.287$), women ($\beta = -0.256$), and men ($\beta = -0.349$), with a group difference of $\Delta = 0.093$. These results reaffirm findings by [Zhang et al. \(2024\)](#) and [Akgunduz et al. \(2022\)](#), who note that happiness is a protective emotional resource. For men, while happiness does not directly lower turnover intention, it does so by reducing hopelessness – highlighting the importance of management practices that actively address negative emotional states to improve retention.

6. Conclusions

This study provides a comprehensive perspective on how workplace happiness and hopelessness influence turnover intention in the Mexican context. Findings indicate that happiness significantly reduces turnover intention directly and indirectly by alleviating feelings of hopelessness. In this sense, happiness acts as a protective emotional resource. The study also reveals gender differences, with happiness having a greater impact on women, while hopelessness more strongly affects men's decisions to leave. These differences highlight the importance of implementing gender-sensitive emotional strategies in the workplace to address the distinct emotional needs of employees.

Emotional states such as happiness and hopelessness should be viewed as interconnected elements influencing key workplace decisions like retention. Organisations that create emotionally supportive environments and address the root causes of hopelessness are better positioned to retain talent. Rather than treating happiness as an isolated factor, it should be integrated into broader strategies to prevent emotional exhaustion and enhance workforce stability.

6.1 Theoretical contributions

This research contributes to the COR theory ([Hobfoll, 1989](#)) by demonstrating how workplace hopelessness mediates the relationship between happiness and turnover intention. Happiness is framed as a key emotional resource, while hopelessness represents its depletion. When hopelessness is high, the positive effects of happiness diminish, leading to a greater likelihood of turnover ([Chiva and Guinot, 2021](#)). This mediation illustrates how emotional losses can interrupt the benefits of wellbeing and trigger withdrawal behaviour.

The study also introduces a gender perspective into COR theory. Results show that women tend to rely more on workplace happiness to resist hopelessness, whereas men are more affected by hopelessness when under stress. It suggests that the mechanisms through which individuals conserve emotional resources differ by gender. By focusing on Mexico, this research also broadens the application of COR theory to emerging markets, where high job insecurity and emotional vulnerability make hopelessness a particularly relevant factor. Additionally, by situating the analysis within the ongoing shift towards AI-assisted and digitally transformed workplaces, the study expands the applicability of COR theory to contexts where technological disruption can both enhance emotional resources and accelerate their depletion. This perspective underscores that the psychological impact of AI, ranging from efficiency gains to perceived obsolescence, may modulate the interplay between happiness and hopelessness, offering a novel bridge between emotional wellbeing theory and current debates on the human implications of AI adoption.

6.2 Practical implications

The findings offer practical guidance for human resource management and organisational strategy, especially in unstable labour markets. Promoting workplace happiness is crucial, but so is preventing and reducing hopelessness, which can undermine employee wellbeing and retention. Organisations should adopt policies that recognise employee contributions, provide growth opportunities, and foster a favourable climate. At the same time, they must address the causes of hopelessness, including workload, job insecurity, and lack of career advancement.

Gender-responsive strategies are also essential. Women benefit more from environments that promote happiness and emotional support, while men respond more to efforts that reduce workplace stress and hopelessness. It calls for tailored wellbeing programmes that adapt to the emotional needs of different groups. In contexts like Mexico, where economic conditions are often precarious, organisations should go beyond superficial engagement and tackle the underlying emotional factors that drive turnover. For example, a manufacturing firm facing high male turnover could combine workload redistribution and transparent communication about job security with stress-management workshops, while simultaneously creating mentoring and recognition programmes for female employees to strengthen engagement and career progression.

Programmes offering psychological support, feedback, and development pathways can help reduce resignation rates and build more substantial commitment. By integrating these targeted interventions into organisational strategy, companies can transform the study's insights into actionable, measurable initiatives that improve retention and overall performance.

6.3 Limitations and future research

This study offers valuable insights, yet certain limitations must be acknowledged. Its cross-sectional design restricts causal inferences between workplace happiness, hopelessness, and turnover intention, suggesting that longitudinal approaches could better capture the evolution of these relationships. The focus on Mexico may also limit generalisability, as sociocultural factors could produce different emotional patterns in other emerging markets; comparative studies in similar regions would help validate these findings. Data collection relied exclusively on self-report online questionnaires, which may introduce standard method and social desirability biases, particularly when assessing sensitive constructs such as hopelessness.

The model examined only three variables, potentially omitting influential factors like organisational culture, justice perceptions, leadership style, work–family conflict, or economic pressures. Future research could expand the model to integrate these variables, particularly leadership styles such as transformational leadership, which may buffer hopelessness and enhance retention. Likewise, evaluating the long-term impact of interventions such as Happiness Management programmes would clarify whether their benefits persist over time.

In the post-pandemic context of digitalisation and remote work, exploring how these arrangements reshape emotional connection to work and influence turnover is critical; cross-comparisons between traditional and virtual workplaces could yield valuable insights. Finally, complementing quantitative designs with qualitative approaches (e.g. in-depth interviews) could capture employees' lived experiences, enabling a richer interpretation of the emotional dynamics studied. Mixed-methods designs provide a more comprehensive, contextually grounded understanding, paving the way for future research in diverse organisational settings.

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Contributions

All authors contributed to the conception and design of the study, as well as to the preparation of the material, data collection, and analysis. The first draft of the manuscript was collectively developed, and all authors reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript.

Ethics statement

This study adhered to the ethical guidelines of the Declaration of Helsinki and national laws. Ethical approval was obtained from the ethics committees of the Autonomous University of Tamaulipas and CETYS University, along with permission for participant sampling. Participants were informed about the research regulations and the code of ethics of the Autonomous University of Tamaulipas, approved in session No. 314. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants, who were informed of their right to withdraw at any time. Measures were taken to ensure anonymity and confidentiality of the information.

Data availability

The datasets and code used in the current study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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Further reading

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Appendix

Table A1 Measurement instruments

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Item code</i>	<i>Item statement</i>	<i>Response scale</i>
Workplace Happiness (Feitor <i>et al.</i> , 2022)	WH1	I feel happy when I am at work	1 = Strongly disagree, 5 = Strongly agree
	WH2	I am satisfied with the work I do	
	WH3	I feel that my work contributes positively to my life	
	WH4	I enjoy collaborating with my colleagues	
Turnover Intention (Bothma and Roodt, 2013)	TI1	I often think about quitting my current job	1 = Strongly disagree, 5 = Strongly agree
	TI2	I will probably look for a new job in the next year	
	TI3	I frequently consider leaving this organisation	
Workplace Hopelessness (Koryczan <i>et al.</i> , 2020)	WHL1	I feel emotionally drained at work	1 = Strongly disagree, 5 = Strongly agree
	WHL2	I believe my work situation will not improve	
	WHL3	I feel pessimistic about my future in this organisation	

Source(s): Own elaboration

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